



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW  
DIRECTOR

September 15, 2006

Detroit Free Press  
Ron Dzwonkowski, Editorial Page Editor  
600 W. Fort Street  
Detroit, MI 48226

Dear Mr. Dzwonkowski:

Child protection is a top priority at the Michigan Department of Human Services. We have been fundamentally reforming the child welfare system in Michigan for the past three years. In that time, we have expanded criminal background checks, engaged the State Police in training caseworkers, increased prevention funding, streamlined our computerized case management system, rolled out the "Family to Family" approach to child welfare in 63 counties, added 51 child protection workers, and accelerated other planned reforms. As a result there are fewer children in foster care, fewer re-entering foster care and an increased percentage of placements in the homes of relatives.

Likewise, an aggressive strategy to improve DHS performance in Oakland County has been in place for over a year. As part of that strategy, the 1,341 children incorrectly characterized in recent media coverage as "at-risk" have been visited and their cases have been investigated. All that remains in each of those cases is the final filing of paperwork. This fact is worth repeating: Every one of these children was previously visited and none were considered at risk.

Nonetheless, the paperwork backlog in Oakland County is unacceptable and we have made significant personnel changes in response, including the reassignment of two senior child welfare staff members. DHS staff in Oakland County, including seven experienced child welfare professionals hired last month specifically for this effort, are working hard to clear the existing paperwork and we expect the backlog will be gone within 60 days.

Child protective services positions have top priority for hiring – in Oakland County and statewide. Positions are filled when they become vacant. The 25 new staff referenced in recent media coverage were hired over a period of nine months.

In the past year, leadership in the Oakland County DHS office has:

- Added 21 child welfare positions beyond those allocated in 2005;
- Strengthened communication by moving all child welfare staff to one location;
- Replaced management in key areas;
- Built a new data tracking system;
- Added new training with the prosecutor and the courts;
- Established a private call-in line for judges and the prosecutor to register any concerns;
- Added a court liaison position.

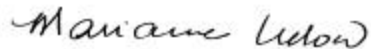
Additional enhancements will occur in the near future, including:

- Hiring a legal liaison to coordinate work with the prosecutor;

- Securing additional attorney general support so DHS case workers can
- increase their focus on children and families;
- Adding additional experienced child welfare leadership.

Longstanding challenges in Oakland County are well-documented in the press and acknowledged by the department, the prosecutor, and the courts. All have committed to improving these relationships. Earlier this summer, Oakland County DHS, along with the courts and the prosecutor, gathered to kick off implementation of the Family to Family approach to child welfare. This event was the most encouraging sign yet, demonstrating our collective belief that stronger collaborations will benefit families, communities, and most importantly, children in Oakland County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marianne Udow".

Marianne Udow